

An excerpt from **HIS LOVE COMPELS** by Tom Olbricht

Concerning the apostle Paul's exhortation to Christians in Corinth who were not honoring Jesus when they ate for that purpose. Tom says, "I wrote the below in my book on the message of the New Testament, *His Love Compels*,"

Another manner in which distinctions were apparent (in Christ's church in Corinth) was along socioeconomic lines. In regard to their eating the Lord's supper Paul wrote,

"When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you . . ." (1 Cor. 11:17,18).

The manner in which they were eating, rather than showing unity, placarded differences.

"When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (1 Cor. 11:20,21).

The early Christians either had to meet early in the morning as evidenced from Pliny's letter to the Roman emperor Trajan, or toward evening as the day came to a close.

According to Pliny they met at both times. It was not until almost three hundred years later that Constantine the first "Christian emperor" declared Sunday as a day for Christian worship and relatively free from commercial activities.

In all likelihood those who came to the assembly early were the more affluent. They brought the best food and wine. Eating commenced soon after these persons higher on the socioeconomic scale arrived.

2 As the shadows crept over the city, servants and slaves trickled into the house where the believers met. They had been involved in house cleaning and food preparing, or in summer harvesting grains, and in fall picking grapes and olives. They had little to bring, and by the time they arrived, most of the food and drink were gone, and they had to go without.

“One goes hungry and another becomes drunk” (1 Cor. 11:21), Paul chided them.

“What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” (1 Cor. 11:22).

The assembly proceeded, according to Paul, in the following manner. When they commenced eating they took a loaf of bread, broke it, and shared it. Then they ate a common meal.

“In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying . . .” (1 Cor. 11:25).

So the practice was—first the breaking of the bread, then the common or agape meal, then after the meal the taking of the cup.

Paul’s solution to the problem of the fractured assembly was that the believers wait before eating until everyone arrived. If waiting posed a problem because those who came early became hungry, then

“eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation” (1 Cor. 11:33,34).

The assembly is the place to show unity in Christ, for he came not only to bring at-one-ment with the Father but also with the children of the Father.

The agape meal or love feast is also attested to in Jude 12. Because of increasing abuse and no doubt too the growing number of believers, the love feast as a practice declined and some bishops in the second century banned it altogether.

RAY COMMENTS: Who could improve on this analysis of the situation? And our “solution” of creating a ritual with each receiving a bit of bread (wafer) and a sip of wine (tiny cup partly filled) is simply NOT the same meal of remembrance which Jesus instituted and which early Christians practiced. Right?

Does that give us something to think about as we plan “worship services” today? May I remind also that there is NO record of the early Christians ever meeting to conduct a ceremonious, ritualistic “worship service”?

Paul exhorted these very Corinthians about whom we just read that when they met, they should seek to bless everyone present and encourage participation in edification by everyone present. “EACH” has a song, a lesson, or a word directly from God (as some in that day did have), Paul says. Our “worship services” are not aimed at edifying, are they? Calling them “worship services” tells the tale.

They are aimed at, directed toward, and planned for activities to praise and please GOD rather than God’s people. Aren’t they? The apostle writes,

1 Cor. 14:26 (ESV) What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

It’s obviously true that none today have a language they themselves don’t understand, or an interpretation for such a message from another. The time of revelation is finished with the death of the last apostle of Jesus Christ. But do some still sing? Do some still have a “lesson” which would edify the group? Should they be heard, or not? Why did we decide to change from edification to worship when we assemble in the name of Jesus?

Other brief Bible studies like this one are also available from Mission Outreach:

- cb-bo1 “What must we DO to be saved?”
- cb-bo2 “Preface to ‘Were You BURIED with Christ?’,”
- cb-bo3 “Introducing ‘Do Peter’s KEYS still open the Way?’,”
- cb-bo4 “Christian Baptism, by Victor Knowles,”

- 4** cb-b05 “Saved/Justified at a ‘Point of Faith’?,”
 cd-b01 “What Does Jesus Say About Himself?”
 cd-b02 “. . . About False Teachers”
 cd-b03 “. . . About False Apostles”
 cd-b04 “Two False Teachings Exposed,”
 cd-b05 “We Follow Jesus in TRUTH,”
 cd-b06 “. . . Follow by dying to sin,”
 cd-b07 “. . . Follow by bearing good fruit,”
 cd-b08 “. . . Follow by obeying His commands,”
 cd-b11 “What Do You Say About JESUS?,”
 cd-b17 “The Mark of the Beast,”
 cd-b18 “Who is accepted by God?,”
 ce-b01 “We are begotten into new life by God’s WORD,”
 ce-b02 “We Sinners are invited to
 SAVE OURSELVES by Turning to JESUS,”
 ce-b03 “Mysteries are UNVEILED. Now we can know,”
 ce-b04 “Hell is Real,”
 ce-b06 “It’s life – or eternal death. WE MUST CHOOSE,”
 ce-b07 “Here’s how to BECOME a Christian,”
 ce-b08 “Here’s how some BECAME Christians,”
 ce-b09 “Here’s why one turned to Christ,”
 ce-b10 “Some turned from idols to the living God,”
 ce-b11 “Jesus Lives!,”
 ce-b12 “Here’s how one found God,”
 ce-b13 “Will eating chocolate save us?,”
 CL-Bo7 “Church leaders are PASTORS,”
 CU-Bo2 “In Search of UNITY in Christ,”
 CU-Co1 “Let’s Move On to a United Future!,” and
 cw-Eo2 “Wise Words About Christian Worship.”

Those who want to find freedom and life in Jesus of Nazareth do well to read and believe the Bible. Jesus built a “family of faith” (the word we use is “church”) where those who believe in Him gather to help one another in the Way which leads to life.